On the Dejection of Eldridge Cleaver from the Black Panther Party and the Defection of the Black Panther Party from the Black Community: April 17, 1971

The Black Panther Party bases its ideology and philosophy on a concrete analysis of concrete conditions, using dialectical materialism as our analytical method. As dialectical materialists we recognize that contradictions can lead to development. The internal struggle of opposites based upon their unity causes matter to have motion as a part of the process of development. We recognize that nothing in nature stands outside of dialectics, even the Black Panther Party. But we welcome these contradictions because they clarify and advance our struggle. We had a contradiction with our former Minister of Information, Eldridge Cleaver, but we understand this as necessary to our growth. Out of this contradiction has come new growth and a return to the original vision of the Party.

Early in the development of the Black Panther Party I wrote an essay titled "The Correct Handling of a Revolution." This was in response to another contradiction: the criticisms raised against the Party by the Revolutionary Action Movement (RAM). At that time RAM criticized us for our above-ground action: openly displaying weapons and talking about the necessity for the community to arm itself for its own self-defense. RAM said that they were underground and saw this as the correct way to handle a revolution. I responded to them by pointing out that you must establish your organization aboveground so that the people can relate to it in a way that will be positive and progressive for them. When you go underground without

doing this you bury yourself so deeply that the people can neither relate to nor contact you. Then the terrorism of the underground organization will be just that—striking fear into the hearts of the very people whose interest the organization claims to be defending—because the people cannot relate to them and there is nobody there to interpret their actions. You have to set up a program of practical action and be a model for the community to follow and appreciate.

The original vision of the Party was to develop a lifeline to the people by serving their needs and defending them against their oppressors, who come to the community in many forms, from armed police to capitalist exploiters. We knew that this strategy would raise the consciousness of the people and also give us their support. Then, if we were driven underground by the oppressors the people would support us and defend us. They would know that in spite of the oppressors' interpretations our only desire was to serve their true interests, and they would defend us. In this manner we might be forced underground but there would be a lifeline to the community which would always sustain us because the people would identify with us and not with our common enemy.

For a time the Black Panther Party lost its vision and defected from the community. With the defection of Eldridge Cleaver, however, we can move again to a full-scale development of our original vision, and come out of the twilight zone which the Party has been in during the recent past.

The only reason that the Party is still in existence at this time, the only reason that we have been able to survive the repression of the Party and the murder of some of our most advanced comrades is because of the Ten-Point Program—our survival program. Our programs would be meaningless and insignificant if they were not community programs. This is why it is my opinion that as long as the Black

community and oppressed people are found in North America, the Black Panther Party will last. The Party will survive as a structured vehicle because it serves the true interests of oppressed people and administers to their needs. This was the original vision of the Party. The original vision was not structured by rhetoric nor by ideology but by the practical needs of the people. And its dreamers were armed with an ideology which provided a systematic method of analysis of how best to meet those needs.

When Bobby Seale and I came together to launch the Black Panther Party, we had observed many groups. Most of them were so dedicated to rhetoric and artistic rituals that they had withdrawn from living in the twentieth cen¬tury. Sometimes their analyses were beautiful but they had no practical programs which would translate these under¬standings to the people. When they did try to develop practical programs, they often failed because they lacked a systematic ideology which would help them make concrete analyses of concrete conditions and gain a full understand¬ing of the community and its needs. When I was in Donald Warden's Afro-American Association, I watched him try to make a reality of community-control through Black capi¬talism. But Warden did not have a systematic ideology, and his attempts to initiate his program continually frustrated him and the community. They did not know why capitalism would not work for them since it had worked for other ethnic groups.

When we formed the Party, we did so because we wanted to put theory and practice together in a systematic manner. We did this through our basic Ten-Point Program. In actuality it was a Twenty-Point Program, with the practice expressed in "What We Want" and the theory expressed in "What We Believe." This program was designed to serve as a basis for a structured political vehicle.

The actions we engaged in at that time were strictly strategic actions for political purposes. They were designed

to mobilize the community. Any action which does not mobilize the community toward the goal is not a revolu¬ tionary action. The action might be a marvelous statement of courage, but if it does not mobilize the people toward the goal of a higher manifestation of freedom it is not making a political statement and could even be counterrevolu¬ tionary.

We realized at a very early point in our development that *revolution is a process.* It is not a particular action, nor is it a conclusion. It is a process. This is why when feudalistic slavery wiped out chattel slavery, feudalism was revolu¬ tionary. This is why when capitalism wiped out feudalism, capitalism was revolutionary. The concrete analysis of con¬ crete conditions will reveal the true nature of the situation and increase our understanding. This process moves in a dialectical manner and we understand the struggle of the opposites based upon their unity.

Many times people say that our Ten-Point Program is reformist, but they ignore the fact that revolution is a process. We left the program open-ended so that it could develop and people could identify with it. We did not offer it to them as a conclusion, we offered it as a vehicle to move them to a higher level. In their quest for freedom and in their attempts to prevent the oppressor from stripping them of all the things they need to exist, the people see things as moving from A to B to C; they do not see things as moving from A to Z. In other words, they have to see first some basic accomplishments in order to realize that major successes are possible. Much of the time the revolutionary will have to guide them into this understanding, but he can never take them from A to Z in one jump because it is too far ahead. Therefore, when the revolutionary begins to indulge in Z, or final conclusions, the people do not relate to him. Therefore he is no longer a revolutionary if revolu¬ tion is a process. This makes any action or function which does not promote the process non-revolutionary.

When the Party went to Sacramento, when the Party faced down the policemen in front of the office of *Ramparts* Magazine, and when the Party patrolled the police with arms, we were acting at a time (1966) when the people had given up the philosophy of non-violent direct action and were beginning to deal with sterner stuff. We wanted them to see the virtues of disciplined and organized armed self¬ defense rather than spontaneous and disorganized out¬ breaks and riots. There were police-alert patrols all over the country, but we were the first *armed* police patrol. We called ourselves the Black Panther Party for Self-Defense. In all of this we had political and revolutionary objectives in mind, but we knew that we could not succeed without the support of the people.

Our strategy was based on a consistent ideology, which helped us to understand the conditions around us. We knew that the law was not prepared for what we were doing and policemen were so shocked that they didn't know what to do. We saw that the people felt a new pride and strength because of the example we set for them; and they began to look toward the vehicle we were building for answers.

Later we dropped the term "Self-Defense" from our name and just became the Black Panther Party. We discouraged actions like Sacramento and police observations because we recognized that these were not the things to do in every situation or on every occasion. We never called these revo¬ lutionary actions. The only time an action is revolutionary is when the people relate to it in a revolutionary way. If they will not use the example you set, then no matter how many guns you have your action is not revolutionary.

The gun itself is not necessarily revolutionary because the fascists carry guns, in fact they have more guns. A lot of so-called revolutionaries simply do not understand the statement by Chairman Mao that "Political power grows out of the barrel of a gun." They thought Chairman Mao said political power *is* the gun, but the emphasis is on

"grows." The culmination of political power is the owner¬ ship and control of the land and the institutions thereon so that we can then get rid of the gun. That is why Chairman Mao makes the statement that "We are advocates of the abolition of war, we do not want war; but war can only be abolished through war, and in order to get rid of the gun, it is necessary to take up the gun." He is always speaking of getting rid of it. If he did not look at it in those terms, then he surely would not be revolutionary. In other words, the gun by all revolutionary principles is a tool to be used in our strategy; it is not an end in itself. This was a part of the original vision of the Black Panther Party.

I had asked Eldridge Cleaver to join the Party a number of times. But he did not join until after the confrontation with the police in front of the office of *Ramparts* Magazine, where the police were afraid to go for their guns. Without my knowledge, he took this as *the* Revolution and *the* Party. But in our basic program it was not until Point 7 that we mentioned the gun, and this was intentional. We were trying to build a political vehicle through which the people could express their revolutionary desires. We recognized that no party or organization can make the revolution, only the people can. All we could do was act as a guide to the people because revolution is a process that moves in a dialectical manner. At one point one thing might be proper, but the same action could be improper at another point. *We always emphasized a concrete analysis of conditions,* and then an appropriate response to these conditions as a way of mobilizing the people and leading them to higher levels of consciousness.

People constantly thought that we were security guards or community police. This is why we dropped the term "Self¬ Defense" from our name and directed the attention of the people to the fact that the only way *they* would get salva¬ tion was through *their* control of the institutions which serve the community. This would require that they organize

a political vehicle which would keep their support and endorsement through its survival programs of service. They would look to it for answers and guidance. It would not be an organization which runs candidates for political office, but it would serve as a watchman over the administrators whom the people have placed in office.

Because the Black Panther Party grows out of the condi¬ tions and needs of oppressed people *we are interested in everything the people are interested in,* even though we may not see these particular concerns as the final answers to our problems. We will never run for political office, but we will endorse and support those candidates who are acting in the true interest of the people. We may even provide campaign workers for them and do voter-registration and basic pre¬ cinct work. This would not be out of a commitment to electoral politics; however, it would be our way of bringing the will of the people to bear on situations in which they are interested. We will also hold such candidates responsible to the community no matter how far removed their offices may be from the community. So we lead the people by follow¬ ing their interests, with a view toward raising their con¬ sciousness to see beyond limited goals.

When Eldridge joined the Party it was after the police confrontation, which left him fixated with the "either-or" attitude. This was that either the community picked up the gun with the Party or else they were cowards and there was no place for them. He did not realize that if the people did not relate to the Party then there was no way that the Black Panther Party could make any revolution, for the record shows that the people are the makers of the revolution and of world history.

Sometimes there are those who express personal prob¬ lems in political terms, and if they are eloquent then these personal problems can sound very political. We charge Eldridge Cleaver with this. Much of it is probably beyond his control because it is so personal. But we did not know

that when he joined the Party; he was doing so only because of that act in front of *Ramparts.* We weren't trying to prove anything to ourselves. All we were trying to do, at that particular point, was to defend Betty Shabazz. But we were praised by the people.

Under the influence of Eldridge Cleaver the Party gave the community no alternative for dealing with us except by picking up the gun. This move was reactionary simply because the community was not prepared to do that at that point. Instead of being a cultural cult group we became, by that act, a revolutionary cult group. But this is a basic contradiction because revolution is a process and if the acts you commit do not fall within the scope of the process then they are non-revolutionary.

What the revolutionary movement and the Black com¬munity need is a very strong structure. This structure can only exist with the support of the people and it can only get its support through serving them. This is why we have the service to the people program—the most important thing in the Party. We will serve their needs so that they can survive through this oppression. Then when they are ready to pick up the gun, serious business will happen. Eldridge Cleaver influenced us to isolate ourselves from the Black commu¬nity so that it was war between the oppressor and the Black Panther Party, not war between the oppressor and the oppressed community.

The Black Panther Party defected from the community long before Eldridge defected from the Party. Our hook-up with White radicals did not give us access to the White community because they do not guide the White commu¬nity. The Black community does not relate to them so we were left in a twilight zone where we could not enter the Black community with any real political education pro¬grams; yet we were not doing anything to mobilize Whites. We had no influence in raising the consciousness of the Black community and that is the point where we defected.

We went through a free speech movement in the Party, which was unnecessary, and only further isolated us from the Black community. We had all sorts of profanity in our paper and every other word which dropped from our lips was profane. This did not happen before I was jailed because I would not stand for it, but Eldridge's influence brought it about. I do not blame him altogether; I blame the Party because the Party accepted it.

Eldridge was never fully in the leadership of the Party. Even after Bobby was snatched away from us I did not place Eldridge in a position of leadership because he was not interested in that. I made David Hilliard administrator of programs. I knew that Eldridge would not do anything to lift the consciousness of the comrades in the Party, but I knew that he could make a contribution and I pressed him to do so. I pressed him to write and edit the paper, but he wouldn't. The paper did not even come out every week until after Eldridge went to jail. But Eldridge Cleaver did make great contributions to the Black Panther Party with his writing and speaking. We want to keep this in mind because there is a positive and negative side to everything.

The correct handling of a revolution is not to offer the people an "either-or" ultimatum. Instead we must gain the support of the people through serving their needs. Then when the police or any other agency of repression tries to destroy the program, the people will move to a higher level of consciousness and action. Then the organized structure can guide the people to the point where they are prepared to deal in many ways. This was the strategy we used in 1966 when the people related to us in a positive way.

So the Black Panther Party has reached a contradiction with Eldridge Cleaver, and he has defected from the Party because we would not order everyone into the streets to¬ morrow to make a revolution. We recognize that this is impossible because our dialectical ideology and our analysis of concrete conditions indicate that declaring a spontane-

ous revolution is a fantasy. The people are not at that point now. This contradiction and conflict may seem unfortunate to some, but it is a part of the dialectical process. The resolution of this contradiction has freed us from incorrect analyses and emphases.

We are now free to move toward the building of a *community structure* which will become a true voice of the people, promoting their interests in many ways. We can continue to push our basic survival programs, we can continue to serve the people as advocates of their true interests, we can truly become a political revolutionary vehicle which will lead the people to a higher level of con¬ sciousness so that they will know what they must really do in their quest for freedom. Then they will have the courage to adopt any means necessary to seize the time and obtain that freedom.